DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 234 424 CS 207 877

AUTHOR Koelling, Robert
TITLE Market Analysis: Helping Creative Writing Students Publish.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Wyoming Conference on Freshman and Sophomore English (Laramie, WY, June 27-July 1, 1983).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Creative Writing; *Higher Education; *Marketing; *Periodicals; Publications; Resource Materials; Writing (Composition); *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Market Analysis; Writers Market (Book); *Writing for Publication

ABSTRACT

Writing instructors can combat the odds against getting published by making sure that students submitting their work to professional publications know what they are doing. Generally, entries in the "Writer's Market" guide to publishing markets include a description of the material the magazine is looking for and words of wisdom from the editor. Probably the most useful general work of its kind, "Writer's Market" can present some problems if used without caution. First, it uses the same format to describe all the magazines, tending to make them sound alike. Second, it occasionally lists magazines no longer publishing or editors no longer on the staff. Third, it states needs in such general terms as to be frequently meaningless. One way to help students avoid these problems is to abstract representative "tips" from the "Writer's Market" listings. These tips fall into five general categories: (1) know the publication, (2) write well, (3) be honest, (4) know the publication's specific needs, and (5) do not be discouraged. "Writer's Market" entries do offer guidelines for writing for specific publications and some sample copies, which are worth sending for. Finally, several additional magazines are useful for market analysis, "The Writer" and "The Writer's Digest" being perhaps the best known. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert Koelling

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Robert Koelling
Northwest Community College
Powell, WY 82435

ED234424

Market Analysis: Helping Creative Writing Students Publish

I thought about calling this presentation "Market Analysis: Helping Creative Writing Students Survive the Urge to Publish." The truth is that there is no way to insure that students will get published. But what we can do is help the odds a bit by making sure that students who want to submit their work to professional publications know what they are doing.

And just what are the odds against getting published? According to a 1981 New York Times Book Review article entitled "Unsolicited, Unloved MSS.," the annual odds against publication for a novel were 29,998 to 2, for short stories it was 249,511 to 489, or a much more encouraging 500 to 1. I don't have any statistics for poetry, though according to the same article the New Yorker receives 25,000 unsolicited poems a year, and I understand they have a staff of folks who open the submissions, stuff the poems back into the enclosed Self Addressed Stamped Envelope, and send it on its merry way back. This isn't to say that the situation is hopeless, but it does indicate the nature of the problem.

My comments this afternoon are based on three assumptions:

First. Most students interested in writing would like

CS 207 877

to publish their work. Joyce Armstrong Carroll put it succinctly in the April 83 issue of the English Journal: publishing is the "Writer's Touchdown."

Second. Periodicals offer the best opportunity (outside of classroom and school publications) for students to publish.

Third. Students don't have to write "great literature" in order to be published. I have a colleague who uttered some words of wisdom that sounded like heresy when I first heard them, trained as I was to appreciate the mysteries of great literature. "There ain't", he said, "no such thing as bad writing--there's only sending your stuff to the wrong market." I am still uncomfortable uttering those words in public, but they do contain a strong element of truth. Sending your material to the right place really helps. Of course, the trick is finding the right place.

I first became interested in market analysis three years ago when I started teaching creative writing classes at Northwest. It wasn't long before I started getting students who would come up to me and say, "I'd like to try and publish some of this. Where do I send it?" As likely as not they'd have a batch of poems in one hand and a copy of the Writer's Market in the other.

Generally the Writer's Market provides the following information:

1. Title of periodical, along with address,

editor's name, and general description of the magazine.

2.Needs: usually a two to five line description of exactly the kind of material the magazine prints and/or is looking for.

3. How to contact: generally a couple of lines on the mechanics of submitting material.

4. Payment: an eye opener for those who think you can make money by writing literature. Most little magazines pay in contributor's copies, of course. Poetry Magazine does pay 1/2 cent per word. At that rate Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" would have earned him a dime, providing the title was included in the figuring.

5. Terms: covers copyright etc.

6. Tips: words of wisdom from the editor.

My suspicion is that the Writer's Market is probably one of the most widely used resources by young writers interested in publishing. It is perhaps the most useful general work of its kind, with names and addresses of a host of magazines neatly arranged by type. But like all tools, the Writer's Market should be used with caution. Careless use can quickly backfire. I want to focus on how to use the Writer's Market to its best advantage, and how to avoid some of the pitfalls in it. First I'd like to talk about some of the dangers I see with using the Writer's Market:

1. All of the magazines tend to become homogenized; they all look alike when presented in the same format. To the extent that all of the magazines become abstractions, the likelihood of sending material which is inappropriate increases. Inky Trails is a small magazine published in Middleton, Idaho. Its entry notes that the magazine needs "literary, contemporary, religious/inspirational, psychic/supernatural, fantasy, romance, western, mystery, adventure, humor, juvenile, [and] young adult" material, while the editor says that she uses "all types of good clean material."

The actual magazine is 66 mimeographed pages which are stapled together. The art work is simple, and poems are often illustrated with art work which appears to have been clipped from a Sears' catalog. This is not to denigrate the magazine, which serves a real need.

But there is a lesson here. From just reading the entry a student may think that Inky Trails is a slick and glossy magazine. If the student has a work accepted by such a magazine, the disparity between the imagined magazine and the reality may be painful. Student may not want to be published in this format. The paradox is that in some cases it may be better not to be published.

2. The magazine may no longer be publishing. Little magazines tend to come and go quickly.

3. People listed as working for the magazine may be

long gone. When editors receive a letter so addressed this is often an indication that the submission is coming from someone who has not read a recent issue of the publication. This is a fairly important point, since one of the most frequently expressed bits of advice editors give is to be familiar with their publications.

4. Needs are so general as to be frequently meaningless. The Texas Review writes "We are eager enough to consider fiction of quality, no matter what its theme or subject matter." It is a small step for a student to conclude that The Texas Review would be a great place to send that first short story, since the student is sure the story is good and anything goes at the Texas Review.

There are ways to help students avoid these problems. One technique that is useful is to go through the Writer's Market and abstract representative "Tips." I have an eight page handout of such "Tips" that I give to my students. The following are representative tips I've taken from the 1982/83 Fiction Writer's market. The Fiction Writer's market is about the same as the writer's market except for the obvious fact that it deals with fiction. These tips were taken from the literary/little magazine section of the book. (I should add that most of these magazines also publish poetry, and most of this advice is equally applicable to poetry.) I'd like to read several of my favorites:

ABBA: "We accept mss handwritten, typed, anything readable. but if you haven't impressed your freshman English instructor, you'll have to be a saint to reach me." (This is a particularly useful comment to read to students who are big on the poetic license school of creative writing.)

ALPHA: "There are a greater number of markets open to writers today. A writer can usually find a market suitable to his material. This is an important factor young writers often overlook." (This is a key point that I'll come back to.)

APALACHEE QUARTERLY: "Write 4 hours every day. Read 100 pages every day. Work diligently, but learn the fundamentals of fiction (point of view, motivation) as soon as possible. Show your work to as many people as possible. If you're rejected more than five times, it may be time to consider revising. (Good reality treatment for the faint hearted. The stress here on reading as well as writing is an important point students sometimes overlook.)

BLUELINE: "We look for concise, clear concrete prose that tells a story and touches upon a universal theme or situation. We prefer realism

to romanticism but will consider nostalgia if well done. Pay attention to grammar and syntax. Avoid murky language, sentimentality, cuteness or folksiness. Read Strunk and White's The Elements of Style. (Strunk and White--another plug for basic literacy.)

CHANNEL X: "Make every word count. Rewrite, polish. Type clearly. Innovate. Think of the reader. Avoid photocopies, unclean typewriter keys, spelling errors (they kill it right there.)" (Further emphasis on competence.)

DE COLORES JOURNAL: "Write, write, write. Then rewrite, rewrite, rewrite." (This is a great counter to the frequently held position that the initial outpourings of the muse aren't to be tampered with.)

MONTANA REVIEW: "Seek the advice and assistance of established writers through workshops, conferences and college creative writing programs." (This is a nice justification for creative writing classes, as long as the students don't realize that the Montana Review is published by the University of Montana, which may not be a completely unbiased source of such advice.)

SUN: "Nothing's necessarily 'wrong' with most rejected mss -- just not what we're looking for. (An encouraging comment that ties in with the comment from ALPHA.)

Tips offer "professional" support for what we spend a great deal of time telling our students. In some ways they are more informative collectively than individually. [See Handout # 1] I've done a rough statistical break down of these tips and the results are interesting. There are 452 entries in the Little magazine section of the Fiction Writers market, and of those 352 offer some advice or the other in the form of a "Tip." Of the 239 commercial magazines listed 169 offer a "Tip."

I went through these tips and categorized them according to the type of advice offered. (I must confess that my categorization was more impressionistic than scientific.) When I got through I was surprised to find that advice from the editors of the little magazines fell into six general categories, and advice from the commercial magazine editors fell into five of those six categories. In cases where an editor stressed more than one item, I counted the entry in each of those categories.

Know Your Market: The CAYLIX entry is a good example of this. This is the primary advice that

editors hit over and over again. The force of this advice makes it pretty clear that editors have lost patience with submissions from people who haven't the foggiest idea of what kind of magazine they are sending their submission to.

Write Well: There are really two main points under this heading. The first refers to writing which is mechanically sound. No grammatical errors or manuscripts which look like they've survived a bad typewriter and three years on the circuit. The other refers to mastering the skills of one's craft, be it fiction or poetry. Many of the entries I've already noted stress this. It is nothing different from what English teachers talk about all year long, but it has a little different impact coming from and editor who might be considering a student's work for publication.

Be honest: I found it interesting that none of the commercial magazines mentioned this. The C.S.P. WORLD NEWS comment is typical: "Be yourself and research well." This is generally an attempt to discourage people from being imitative.

Magazine's specific needs: Often the needs section of the entry is a general comment on what

the magazine publishes, and in the tip they will remark that they are particularly short on something like the poetry on the gay cowboy experience in Wyoming.

Don't be discouraged. This is easier said than done, but it is consoling to students. They've got to be hardened from word go to expect rejection slips and not to take them personally.

Knowing the market, then, becomes a very crucial aspect of trying to get one's work published. Finally, the entries in the Writer's market do not provide enough real information to help directly. In fact, as I've mentioned before, the opposite is often true. It provides a source where students can send material to magazines they've never even heard of, much less read. The common format tends to make all the magazines appear the same.

But there are some things in the Writer's Market that can help, if taken in advantage of. This entry in Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine is typical: "Free fiction guidelines with legal-sized SASE. Sample copy $2.50." For an SASE you get a two page course in how to write science fiction, as well as a two page sample of how a manuscript should look when submitted.

If you have many students interested in

publishing, writer's guidelines are worth the effort of sending off for. The guidelines from Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine are longer than usual, but not as long as some. (Mother Earth News sends out one that is 16 pages long.) I have a binder with a variety of writer's guidelines in them and student frequently look through it.

Also note that for $2.50 you can get a sample copy of the magazine. Many periodicals will send you a sample copy for free--their entry in the Writer's Market will indicate that. Most little magazines can't afford that, but are glad to send a sample copy for anywhere from 2 to 5 bucks. I've found this one of the most useful things that I've done to help students. I paste a xerox of its Writer's Market entry to the appropriate magazine and then let the kids make the comparison themselves. If you can get your department to spring for a hundred bucks you can build a respectable library of little magazines. Even university libraries usually carry a very limited selection of little magazines, so it is pretty difficult for students to have the chance to read what is out there. More than anything else, it serves to drive home the point that there are a great variety of magazines out there, and there really is a world of difference between The Blue Unicorn, which notes that its "main criteria is excellence" and that it appeals "especially to the discriminating lover of poetry," and Tarus, which says quite simply, "no grants, no forms, no loitering, no bullshit."

A couple of final comments. There are several magazines which are useful for market analysis. The Writer and The Writer's Digest are perhaps the most well known. I prefer the Writer because it seems to offer more straight market news and fewer chipper sermons on cracking the market.

Coda, Poets and Writers Newsletter, is very useful, though many of its requests for needed material are extremely narrow. Finally, a periodical that I find delightful is a little magazine devoted to reviewing little magazines. It is called the Literary Magazine Review and it is published by the Kansas State University Writer's Society. The magazine is a gem, full of direct (often painfully direct) reviews of the innumerable little magazines which spring up around this country. Also, the International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses is crammed full of information, but suffers the same chance of misuse as the Writer's Market.

One word of warning about market analysis, however. It can become an end in itself. I often get older students who have elevated market analysis to a religion. They are convinced that there is a secret formula for getting their material published, and they spend all of their time looking for it. Finally there is no substitute for good writing and good reading.

Art Cuelho, who publishes a number of little magazines in Big Timber, Montana, made the point rather sadly in a

letter to me that a lot of people were more interested in seeing their work printed in a magazine than they were in reading that magazine. Finally, publishing can be simply another form of narcissism. We need to get the kids to read, as well as to write.

I'd like to conclude with a heart warming quote from the New York Times Book Review entitled "Unsolicited, Unloved MSS," that I quoted from earlier. Daniel Menaker wrote "Thousands of college and universities and community arts centers offer courses in creative writing, either leading to a Master of Fine Arts degree or as one-shot deals in night school or adult-education programs. . . . There is general agreement among professional writers and editors that with some exceptions--prominent among them the M. F. A. course at the University of Iowa, Johns Hopkins, Columbia and Stanford--these curricula are of extremely dubious value, except perhaps to the institutions themselves. `Many of the people who run these programs are shameless,' Marcia Magill says. `They pander to the pipe dreams of naive people for the sole purpose of making a buck. They take the egg money from working men and women and stand some third-rate writer up in front of them for a semester, and then at the end they invite a visiting writer or editor to give a speech and go to a cocktail party. . . . Insofar as these people have been led to believe that they have a professional future, the situation is both outrageous and sad."

Obviously, I don't agree with that assessment. I am

not sure to what extent we can educate people to be writers, but I think that we can educate them as to exactly what the realities of being a writer means.

Handout # 1

"Tips" from the 1982/83 Fiction Writer's Market*

	Little Magazines	Commercial Magazines
Know your market	45%	43%
Write well	35%	37%
Be honest	13%	---
Magazine's specific needs	9%	23%
Don't be discouraged	6%	6%

*Jean M. Fredette and John Brady, ed., 1982/83 Fiction Writer's Market (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1982). These figures are only intended to represent general trends. Approximately 78% of the little magazines and 71% of the commercial magazines offered advice under the heading of "Tips." In cases where the "Tip" emphasized more than one of these categories it was included in each category it stressed.